



Start growing your money Today [Get started](#) **HSBC Advance** **HSBC** The world's local bank

movie reviews

[Reviews](#) [Great Movies](#) [Answer Man](#) [People](#) [Commentary](#) [Festivals](#) [Oscars](#) [Glossary](#) [One-Minute Reviews](#) [Letters](#) [Roger Ebert's Journal](#) [Scanners](#) [Store](#)

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES [News](#) [Sports](#) [Business](#) [Entertainment](#) [Classifieds](#) [Columnists](#)

search

.....

 GO Search powered by **YAHOO!**

register

You are not logged in.

[Log in](#) »

[Subscribe to weekly newsletter](#) »

times & tickets

[Fandango](#)
[Search movie showtimes and buy tickets.](#)

about us

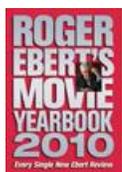
[About the site](#) »

[Site FAQs](#) »

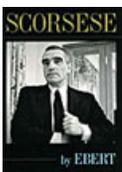
[Contact us](#) »

[Email the Movie Answer Man](#) »

on sale now



[Buy now](#) »



[Buy now](#) »



THE LAST AIRBENDER (PG)

Ebert: ★ Users: ★★ You: [Rate this movie right now](#)



This is about as bright as "The Last Airbender" gets.

The Last Airbender

BY ROGER EBERT / June 30, 2010

"The Last Airbender" is an agonizing experience in every category I can think of and others still waiting to be invented. The laws of chance suggest that *something* should have gone right. Not here. It puts a nail in the coffin of low-rent 3D, but it will need a lot more coffins than that.

Let's start with the 3D, which was added as an afterthought to a 2D movie. Not only is it unexploited, unnecessary and hardly noticeable, but it's a disaster even if you like 3D. [M. Night Shyamalan's](#) retrofit produces the drabest, darkest, dingiest movie of any sort I've seen in years. You know something is wrong when the screen is filled with flames that have the vibrancy of faded Polaroids. It's a known fact that 3D causes a measurable decrease in perceived brightness, but "Airbender" looks like it was filmed with a dirty sheet over the lens.

Now for the movie itself. The first fatal decision was to make a live-action film out of material that was born to be anime. The animation of the Nickelodeon TV series drew on the bright colors and "clear line" style of such masters as Miyazaki, and was a pleasure to observe. It's in the very nature of animation to make absurd visual sights more plausible.

Since "Airbender" involves the human manipulation of the forces of air, earth, water and fire, there is hardly an event that can be rendered plausibly in live action. That said, its special effects are

cast & credits

Aang Noah Ringer
 Prince Zuko Dev Patel
 Katara Nicola Peltz
 Sokka Jackson Rathbone
 Uncle Iroh Shaun Toub
 Zhao Aasif Mandvi
 Fire Lord Ozai [Cliff Curtis](#)

Paramount Pictures presents a film written and directed by [M. Night Shyamalan](#). Running time: 103 minutes. Rated PG (for fantasy action violence).

[Printer-friendly](#) »
[E-mail this to a friend](#) »



Substantial Savings. 700+ Trusted Brands

Cabinets Lighting Flooring Appliances Furniture Electronics

DirectBuy FREE Visitor's Pass >

in theaters

latest reviews

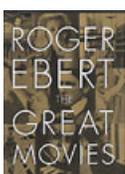
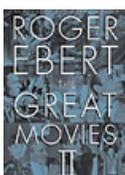
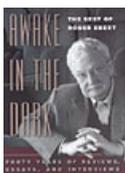
- ☆☆ [A Small Act](#)
- ☆☆ [Despicable Me](#)
- ☆☆ [Dogtooth](#)
- ☆☆ [The Girl Who Played with Fire](#)
- ☆☆ [The Kids are All Right](#)
- ☆☆ [La Mission](#)
- ☆☆ [9500 Liberty](#)
- ☆☆ [Predators](#)

[more current releases](#) »

one-minute movie reviews

still playing

- ☆☆ [The A-Team](#)
- ☆☆ [Accomplices](#)
- ☆☆ [Babies](#)
- ☆☆ [The Back-up Plan](#)
- ☆☆ [Cell 211](#)
- ☆☆ [Coco Chanel and Igor Stravinsky](#)
- ☆☆ [Cyrus](#)
- ☆☆ [Daddy Longlegs](#)
- ☆☆ [Despicable Me](#)
- ☆☆ [Dogtooth](#)
- ☆☆ [Exit Through the Gift Shop](#)
- ☆☆ [The Father of My Children](#)
- ☆☆ [Get Him to the Greek](#)
- ☆☆ [The Girl on the Train](#)
- ☆☆ [The Girl Who Played with Fire](#)
- ☆☆ [The Good Heart](#)
- ☆☆ [Grown Ups](#)
- ☆☆ [Harry Brown](#)
- ☆☆ [Holy Rollers](#)
- ☆☆ [Hubble 3D](#)
- ☆☆ [The Human Centipede](#)
- ☆☆ [I am Love](#)
- ☆☆ [Iron Man 2](#)



atrocious. The first time the waterbender Katara summons a globe of water, which then splashes (offscreen) on her brother Sokka, he doesn't even get wet. Firebenders' flames don't seem to really burn, and so on.

The story takes place in the future, after Man has devastated the planet and survives in the form of beings with magical powers allowing them to influence earth, water and fire. These warring factions are held in uneasy harmony by the Avatar, but the Avatar has disappeared, and Earth lives in a state of constant turmoil caused by the warlike Firebenders.

Our teenage heroes Katara and Sokka discover a child frozen in the ice. This is Aang (Noah Ringer), and they come to suspect he may be the Avatar, or Last Airbender. Perhaps he can bring harmony and quell the violent Firebenders. This plot is incomprehensible, apart from the helpful orientation that we like Katara, Sokka and Aang and are therefore against their enemies.

The dialogue is couched in unspeakable quasi-medieval formalities; the characters are so portentous they seem to have been trained for grade school historical pageants. Their dialogue is functional and action-driven. There is little conviction that any of this might be real even in their minds. All of the benders in the movie appear only in terms of their attributes and functions, and contain no personality.

Potentially interesting details are botched. Consider the great iron ships of the Firebenders. These show potential as Steampunk, but are never caressed for their intricacies. Consider the detail Miyazaki lavished on Howl's Moving Castle. Trying sampling a Nickelodeon clip from the original show to glimpse the look that might have been.

After the miscalculation of making the movie as live action, there remained the challenge of casting it. Shyamalan has failed. His first inexplicable mistake was to change the races of the leading characters; on television Aang was clearly Asian, and so were Katara and Sokka, with perhaps Mongolian and Inuit genes. Here they're all whites. This casting makes no sense because (1) It's a distraction for fans of the hugely popular TV series, and (2) all three actors are pretty bad. I don't say they're untalented, I say they've been poorly served by Shyamalan and the script. They are bland, stiff, awkward and unconvincing. Little Aang reminds me of [Wallace Shawn](#) as a child. This is not a bad thing (he should only grow into Shawn's shoes), but doesn't the role require little Andre, not little Wally?

As the villain, Shyamalan has cast [Cliff Curtis](#) as Fire Lord Ozai and Dev Patel (the hero of "[Slumdog Millionaire](#)") as his son Prince Zuko. This is all wrong. In material at this melodramatic level, you need teeth-gnashers, not leading men. Indeed, all of the acting seems inexplicably muted. I've been an admirer of many of Shyamalan's films, but action and liveliness are not his strong points. I fear he takes the theology of the Bending universe seriously.

As "The Last Airbender" bores and alienates its audiences, consider the opportunities missed here. (1) This material should have become an A-list animated film. (2) It was a blunder jumping aboard the 3D bandwagon with phony 3D retro-fitted to a 2D film. (3) If it had to be live action, better special effects artists should have been found. It's not as if films like "[2012](#)" and "[Knowing](#)" didn't contain "real life" illusions as spectacular as anything called for in "The Last Airbender."

I close with the hope that the title proves prophetic.

- [Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work](#)
- [Jonah Hex](#)
- [Just Wright](#)
- [The Karate Kid](#)
- [The Kids are All Right](#)
- [The Killer Inside Me](#)
- [Knight and Day](#)
- [The Last Airbender](#)
- [Letters to Juliet](#)
- [The Losers](#)
- [Love Ranch](#)
- [Marmaduke](#)
- [Micmacs](#)
- [La Mission](#)
- [Mother and Child](#)
- [A Nightmare on Elm Street](#)
- [9500 Liberty](#)
- [October Country](#)
- [OSS 117: Lost in Rio](#)
- [Please Give](#)
- [Predators](#)
- [Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time](#)
- [Princess Kaiulani](#)
- [Putty Hill](#)
- [Restrepo](#)
- [Ricky](#)
- [Robin Hood](#)
- [The Secret in Their Eyes](#)
- [Sex and the City 2](#)
- [A Shine of Rainbows](#)
- [A Small Act](#)
- [A Small Act](#)
- [Solitary Man](#)
- [Splice](#)
- [The Square](#)
- [Survival of the Dead](#)
- [That Evening Sun](#)
- [Toy Story 3](#)
- [The Twilight Saga: Eclipse](#)
- [The Twilight Saga: Eclipse](#)
- [Vincent: A Life in Color](#)
- [Who Do You Love?](#)
- [The Wild Hunt](#)
- [Winter's Bone](#)

[more current releases »](#)

on dvd

new on dvd

- [Terribly Happy](#) ★★★ (7/13)
- [Our Family Wedding](#) ★★ (7/13)
- [Greenberg](#) ★★★★★ (7/13)
- [The Greatest](#) ★★ (7/13)
- [Formosa Betrayed](#) ★★★ (7/13)
- [Chloe](#) ★★★★★ (7/13)
- [A Single Man](#) ★★★ (7/6)
- [Legal Eagles](#) ★★★ (7/6)
- [The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo](#) ★★★★★ (7/6)

Lose 46 Lbs in 3 Months?

Discover the Shocking Truth About Canada's Hottest Diet...
[WeeklyHealthC...](#)

Your city: Mom Making \$6500 a Month @ Home

She earns \$6500 a month working online at home, read how she...

world13news.C...

Which Diet Pills Work?

Experts rank the top 5 diet pills - 93% lost weight... Learn...

DietRatings.org

<p>Obama Urges Homeowners to Refinance If you owe less than \$729k you probably www.SeeRefinanceRates.com</p>
<p>Online Degrees Get Your AA, BA, Masters or PhD at a Top Education. Nextag.com/Online-Degrees</p>
<p>Privacy Window Film for Less Get discounts on a wide variety of www.TechnologyLK.com</p>
<p>Invest in Gold: Learn How Gold Delivered to Your Door. Goldline.com/Gold</p>

Ads by Yahoo!

[The White Ribbon](#) ★★★★★ (6/29)

[more new on dvd >](#)

coming on dvd

- [Mother](#) ★★★★★ (7/20)
- [The Runaways](#) ★★★ (7/20)
- [Repo Men](#) ★★ (7/27)
- [The Secret of the Grain](#) ★★★★★ (7/27)
- [Vincere](#) ★★★★★ (7/27)
- [Diary of a Wimpy Kid](#) ★★★★★ (8/3)
- [The Ghost Writer](#) ★★★★★ (8/3)

[more coming on dvd >](#)

great movies on dvd

- [Gone With the Wind](#) (4/13)
- [Vivre sa Vie / My Life to Live](#) (4/20)
- [Viridiana](#) (4/29)
- [Walkabout](#) (5/18)
- [Come and See](#) (6/16)

[more great movies on dvd >](#)



© copyright 2010, rogerebert.com

[Privacy Policy](#) [Terms of Use](#) [Submission Guidelines](#)



Imagine Your Dream Kitchen at Direct Insider Prices.

Cabinets	Flooring	Furniture
Lighting	Appliances	Electronics

